

Jacques Ségot - Christian Maréchal

# Who Framed Excellence?



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**Jacques Ségot - Christian Maréchal**

# **Who Framed Excellence?**

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CHAPTER  
**I**

**When an old case  
is surfacing again**



ON THE OCCASION OF THE EFQM 2008 FORUM IN PARIS,  
THE LA POSTE GROUP QUALITY AND INTERNAL CONTROL DIVISION  
IS PLEASED TO OFFER YOU THE ADVANCED PROOFS OF THIS NOVEL.

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## WHO FRAMED EXCELLENCE?

*Many thanks to  
Gilles Renaud and Nathalie Maréchal  
for the English translation.*

JACQUES SÉGOT - CHRISTIAN MARÉCHAL

# **Who Framed Excellence?**



## **Foreword**

This is not an ordinary book. The fact that a mystery novel embraces the field of quality clearly proves the social acceptance of this concept. Quality is no longer limited to technical circles; now it concerns each of us and all walks of life. Customer orientation has become a requirement that cannot be ignored, the elimination of superfluous costs is now a necessity, and trying to obtain staff involvement cannot be eluded.

But a lot remains to be done if we want to develop our firms' competitiveness and our government institutions' performance. This is why I am grateful to our two authors for giving us an entertaining image of quality: arousing the desire for it can only increase its understanding and its use.

EFQM – which is the subject of this book – was born just 20 years ago. What strikes me first is the flexibility of this model, its capacity to integrate the best practices developed in recent years. But – even more importantly – I am struck by its modernity, for example, the current thinking on sustainable development, the increasing demand for social ethics, or the balance to be found between economic performance, customer and people satisfaction, and also corporate social responsibility.

Obviously this novel is neither a technical nor a theoretical book. However, one can find through it scattered – or, I should say, hidden – explanations, notes and thoughts that, in the end, make up a stimulating description of management by quality based on EFQM. One can learn with pleasure, and everyone – business leaders, managers, staff or even students wishing to further their knowledge of management concepts – can find in this book “something to chew on,” as would probably say Scribble, this picturesque character who gives the book its colour and attractive pace.

Through their personalities and interactions with one another, the characters truly represent the reality of what occurs within the firm, within the society – of which the firm is a mirror – and more generally within every living system.

Let’s hope this book will help to understand the principles of excellence, but also their implementation in the context of a firm where human relationship play a key role and where a team’s success is more than the sum of individual contributions.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chris Lebeer', with a long horizontal flourish underneath.

**Chris LEBEER**

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER - EFQM

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## CHAPTER ONE

### **When an old case is surfacing again**

It was a beautiful morning, that sounded quite in tune with the season in that privileged spot on the Mediterranean shore. One of these warm days in early spring, filled with fragrances that were produced by a bursting vegetation in full bloom following a gloomy winter season. Police chief Charmé was walking at a quiet pace on hiking trail no. 98-51 that runs along the coast, meandering through the pine trees from Cassis to Marseille. He had been invited for a short but relaxing stay by an old friend, Timothée Scribble, who was enjoying retirement near the quarries from had come the yellowish stone used to build the staircases leading up to Saint-Charles railway station, as well as the great Egyptian harbour of Alexandria or the base of the Statue of Liberty in New York City. The two men had become friends in their school days, and they had known the throes of the bad mark that has to be announced to a strict father, but also the joys of winning a football game on an empty field behind the cemetery against a team from the neighbouring district. On such unforgettable moments are lifelong friendships built. Life had kept them mostly apart, but regularly they also had found each other again thanks to professional events or to opportunities of their own creation.

Timothée, who had retired from a career in the armed forces, had immersed himself since that time in the local culture, which is particularly good at putting the art de vivre in practice. He would sprinkle his speech with colourful expressions typical of that region of France. He felt like a new man. He had been very active within the intelligence services, but now he was living at a very different pace. He spent his days watching flowers grow, or reading exclusively the local newspaper because he was not interested in anything that might remind him of the vicious brutality of his previous life. He had taken up cooking hearty meals, preferably with a lot of fat, which he liked to complement with all kinds of wines in abundance. Such habits led to naps that produced deafening sounds, to the great displeasure of his neighbours. He had become a man of imposing stature and would hide his curves under loose and colourful clothing. “I spent my life disguising myself, now it’s time to show my face in broad daylight”, he would declare. He had once been an accomplished athlete, but now his physical activity was limited to playing pétanque, for which he had built a good reputation teaching lessons to many locals who were at a loss to explain the Parisian’s dexterity.

Charmé had come to a halt in order to contemplate the sea view. The waves were undulating peacefully, in a slow and regular movement. They made him forget the “factory”. However, he suddenly felt his cell phone buzzing in his pocket.

– You damn fool, you forgot to turn it off! But, shit! I won’t let myself be upset by it.

Yet, habits prevailed, and he looked at the number appearing on the screen.

– Shit! It’s Sparky calling! I made myself clear, though. I do not want to be bothered except if it is absolutely necessary, he swore to himself.

His hand was faster than his thoughts and turned the phone on. What if it were an urgent matter?

– Boss, we’ve got a problem...

Charmé’s associate did not have the time to finish his sentence.

– No, YOU might have a problem, and you will certainly be in trouble if you are calling me for trifles as I am deep in my thoughts.

The Police Chief had turned philosophical as he got older. As a young Inspector, he had loved to be on duty, keeping watch like a hunter waiting for his prey, the howling sirens and all the excitement associated to making an arrest. He was a confirmed bachelor and a tireless ladies' man who made use of his good looks, the prestige of his job and his name that he bore as a flag. With the passing years, he had started to enjoy other pleasures as well, like the ones produced by the vision of a landscape, the flavour of a meal or the emotion linked to a Puccini's opera. He had discovered other horizons and, recently, a whole world of countless friends thanks to reading. He loved saying that to read is like listening to a friend talking to you, telling you stories, sharing his thoughts with you.

– It is serious, boss! We've got a corpse at PrintCo<sup>1</sup>.

Silence came back to the hiking trail. The detective respected it religiously, hoping that the Police Chief could duly evaluate the situation: the days off he had requested for the long weekends in May were at stake.

– Who died, and what is the cause of death? the Police Chief asked briefly.

– Jean Latour. He worked at the plant. He was crushed by falling paper rolls. It happened last night at two A.M.

The Police Chief froze on the spot.

– Do you think it's worth bothering me? I would say it is an occupational accident, not a murder!

– But...Boss...!

– You'll have to manage on your own, I'm on vacation and that's where I'll stay!

Charmé angrily kicked a pine cone. That stupid Sparky had ruined everything. He resumed his walk trying to forget his associate's phone

1. See *Meurtres à l'ombre de la qualité*, a thriller that explains the principles of quality.

call but the moment was ruined, and even the view of two squirrels could not divert him from his new thoughts. There was nothing left to be done except to turn back. It was almost 11 A.M. when he reached the gate of the “Sheep Shack”, as Scribble liked to call his house in memory of his many hide-outs in secluded places. His friend was waiting for him casually sprawled on a couch, protected from the sunlight by the porch.

– You look livid. Bad luck with the ladies? the retired man asked with an undisguised amusement.

Charmé glared at the former secret service agent, who did not seem impressed at all.

– Let’s knock back a few cold ones, and you’ll unload your problems unto me.

– So you speak slang, now? Charmé asked, still angry but ready to give up.

– I am a polyglot, a citizen of the world and a lover of foreign tongues, bello.

– Your wife certainly suffered from you heroic love of all mankind, or at least womankind.

– Yeah right, the Ladies’ Man himself is judging me now! That beats everything!

Once the first bottle was empty, Scribble leaned eagerly toward his friend.

– C’mon, spit it out!

– No way, we agreed not to talk about work.

Tim Scribble, who expected a first-grade salacious story, answered with anger hoping that the Police Chief would fly off the handle, just to feign an argument that only could be stopped by the second bottle, which he had put in the fridge.

– So your face is a mile long for a frigging murder? That’s what you are ruining my hard-earned retirement for?

– It is not a murder, but an occupational accident.

– But a man did die!

–Yes, but all accidents are not murders. In that particular case, we have got an unfortunate accident that does not concern me.

–Wow! When you start using the language of the upper must, that’s because you have a serious problem.

–You should say “upper crust” or rather “upper most”, the Police Chief replied sharply.

–And now you play the wise professor, Scribble said emphatically with a pied-noir accent, not sorry to see how the conversation was developing: finally the fight he wished for was imminent. He could almost see Charmé falling in his trap. Now he got his revenge! Last time, Scribble had lost his temper, and swallowed the whole incredible story that had been worked out by Charmé. He had not anticipated the trick and he had made himself ridiculous in front of a whole bunch of bimbos.

The Police Chief looked at him pensively. Lost in thought, he was impervious to the secret agent’s attacks, and his silence upset Scribble so much that the latter interrupted his attack.

–The accident happened at PrintCo, which worries me, the Police Chief announced with a feeble voice.

–Here we are, the former intelligence officer grunted. Why didn’t you say so? That accident can only be a murder, it is as obvious as your nose on your face.

Both men still remembered the PrintCo affair. Neither of them had participated directly to its resolution but they had heard of it in their respective departments because of the big stir it had created.

–Just because we had a murder in the past doesn’t mean that it’s a custom within this firm, the Police Chief said. The company is under new management and it strives to become a model.

–That’s no excuse! On the contrary, if it wants to be taken as a model, there should not be any occupational accidents. It sticks out like a sore thumb paper rolls do not collapse so easily and, would you believe, at night, precisely when no one needs to touch them. Trust me. This is a murder, history repeats itself.

Charmé already knew this argument. He had repeated it to himself for more than two hours. Following the tragedies it had experienced, the firm had embarked in a programme to renew its management practices, had put its quality system in order and drafted a commitment to become an ethical model. Certainly negligence was always possible. On top of that, there was that call from Sparky. Charmé had not given him the time to speak. Maybe something had alerted the Inspector<sup>2</sup>.

– I'll call the factory, the Police Chief said reluctantly, as he had a feeling of an impending doom.

– And I'll go pack, Timothée Scribble said, bouncing with a springiness that one could hardly expect from such a bulky man.

– Surely not, Charmé answered in a roar.

– Surely yes, the former special agent replied as he inserted his stout body through the entrance door frame. This is an espionage case and you will need the expertise of a lord of darkness, he added as he turned round in a sweeping movement. And I will finally get to know your gorgeous Carla. The Police Chief had met Carla Brunetta during an affair that had received a lot of media attention<sup>3</sup>. It had been announced on prime time television that Flawless Protection, a company that had just been listed on the stock exchange, had failed to honour its commitments. Elegant Carla, who was an expert in malfeasance, had solved the enigma brilliantly, to Charmé's great surprise, and he had been singing her praises ever since.

Charmé did not try to argue. He wanted to hear from his Inspector whatever the cost. He had made his decision. He would pretend that nothing had happened. He dialled the number.

– Mister Sparky, how are things going?

The Inspector had recognized the Police Chief's number. The introductory tone did not bode well. He decided not to comment in order to avoid annoying his boss and thus jeopardizing his annual leave.

– Some elements are disturbing. Nobody needed to grab a paper roll and, so, to be on the platform to access the goods. But the closed circuit cameras do not show anything.

– Who was on the scene?

– They were five people, including the four guys who were working together when the accident happened. Jean Latour was making his round and when he reached the roll pile, it collapsed. His head banged against a pole. He died instantly.

– How were the rolls fastened?

– With straps. It seems that one of them broke. Not a clean cut.

– When was the last check?

– The safety audit was done a month ago. Everything was in order.

– So it is an accident? the Police Chief concluded. This way, his holidays could continue.

– Boss, the Inspector said with a hesitant voice, as he did not want his chief to turn against him, the straps had been checked, so it was unthinkable that they could break like his.

– I'll think about it, briefly said the Police Chief, who was confused by his assistant's remark.

He hung up. Scribble was looking at him, his eyes welling up with joy. A new adventure was just around the corner.

– Let's go, bello!

They have been speeding for three hours now and they were entering the series of hairpin bends that would lead them to the Larzac plateau. The Cirque of Navacelles offered them a breathtaking view.

– I see that you respect the speed limit, Scribble said mockingly. You are getting old.

– As I require my people to respect the law, I must do the same, even if I don't like it<sup>4</sup>.

2. Quality as a culture helps to be good at listening to other people, your customers but also your associates and colleagues. To pay attention to others contributes to improvement and innovation. Although he became conscious of the quality requirement, Charmé does not yet stick to it automatically.

3. Ref. to L'énigme du processus.

4. Role modelling is at the centre of the leadership principle: it generates confidence in the manager.

– Nonsense. Should we respect the law, we would be eaten by all those who don't care about it.

– Maybe there are sectors or circumstances where your position can be defended but, as for me, I am in no doubt. I stick to this rule. It is a question of role modelling.

– Wow! Did your ladybird put that in your thick skull?

– I kindly suggest you to speak to her more respectfully if you do not want to risk your neck. She made me discover quality...

– And leadership! Timothée Scribble thundered before bursting out laughing in a funny way.

Charmé kept calm.

– You can laugh, and guffaw, as much as you want, but remember: you felt safe when captain George, in Algeria, remained at our side and reassured us as he gave us his instructions. He was not the last to risk his life, always where the action was, like every one in the group. That's leadership. And the day when the major gave his bottle to the young recruit who was dead thirsty, you applauded. This also is leadership. You expect from a chief more than orders to execute. Through his behaviour, he must command respect, set an objective and inspire others to reach it.

– That's okay, bello. I've heard it all before. You should admit, though, that there are few real leaders. They are people of the past, who were cast in a different mould.

– I don't agree. Leadership is a skill that can be taught, and learned. It is based on specific practices that every manager has to know and apply.

– But you ignore individual personality. Some people are better than others at human relations!

– That's true, but if you want to become a chef in a restaurant, you find it normal to learn the job, the food products, and the ways to cook them. What's the difference with the job of a team leader? Once you have understood that communication is important, you accept to take lessons and to apply the acquired rules. Why, when it

comes having men and women working together, do we refuse to apply some rules seriously?

– You are wearing your brain out, said Timothée Scribble, who felt overwhelmed by such a discussion. My way to communicate with people was always clear for the other party as long as I had a gun in my hand. Believe me, your dear Carla managed to put some strange ideas into your head, and she is a dangerous person.

– So be careful, we'll inevitably meet her.

– Okay, put a requiem on, please, so that I can prepare for the afterlife, but not the Fauré one. I prefer the Verdi, which is more resounding. But look at that scenery. Isn't it gorgeous?

They arrived late, too late to get started on anything. The next day, they went directly to PrintCo. Inspector Sparky, with whom Charmé had made an appointment, was waiting for them. Norbert Smarto, as the general manager of the firm, welcomed them. They walked together to the scene of the tragedy, where they made a detailed inspection. Nothing emerged from it. The accident theory had to be accepted if no other explanation could be offered with tangible evidence. When time had come to leave, Timothée Scribble expressed the wish to visit the premises and speak to the staff.

– I love printing, he said with a voice filled with wonder. I would dream of it when I was a child: listening to the press running, smelling the ink, and then suddenly witnessing the birth of a beautiful poster full of colours!

The general manager smiled at the childish tone used by big Timothée and hastily accepted before Charmé had time to step in. The latter could only give a nasty look to the sly agent, who pretended nothing had happened, whooping for joy and dancing like a football player who has just scored.

– Bye bye, Timothée said with a broad smile, as he waved to the Police Chief. See you tonight at Carla's.

The relationship between Charmé and Carla had begun five years

earlier. The Police Chief had been beguiled by this forceful woman and her irresistible mix of impetuosity and attractiveness. This tomboy exuded feminine sensuality. A pair of jeans or a dressing gown looked as good on her as a gents or ladies' suit. She was a great tango dancer, and slow dancing with her quickly became sheer torture. To top it all off, she could cook a delicate meal as easily as a light snack. She was a self-taught woman who showed a keen interest in everything. Her main flaw was her quick temper. But she had such a talent for coaxing and trapping a poor fellow to gain his support! In short, Charmé swore by her even though he had no intention of giving up skirt-chasing.

Early in the evening, the former secret agent took a taxi to Brunetta's house. It was an old building, nestled at the bottom of a dead end and concealed from the public eye by thick hedges. When he crossed the gate of this sanctuary, Scribble quivered with pleasure thinking that he was to meet the expert brunette. Charmé was already waiting for him; hopping up and down with impatience. He was nearly flaring up.

– What did you do down there? You have no warrant for that. Are you crazy? the Police Chief shouted.

– Cool, man. First, please introduce me to this lady of nobility.

And without waiting for his friend's reaction, he bowed before the hostess, who was amused at the scene.

– My name is Scribble, Chipolata 17 11, to please you, he stated with modesty.

– Well, agent Chipolata, please join us to knock back a glass and relate in great detail what your honour did this afternoon, she answered with the same bombastic tone.

The two men sat down in armchairs and, while Carla Brunetta went to the kitchen for drinks, Timothée could not refrain declaring to Charmé in order to rile him a bit more:

– This is a first-rate girl! Watch out, I am already gone on her!

The young woman caught his last words and asked him:

– Are you already prepared to drop on someone?

– Not at all, Charmé answered as a way to step in. Timothée said

that he had been nearly caught in middle of the action. Tell us what you did there, you scoundrel and damn impostor!

Tim did not react to the insult and, before answering, he took the time to drink greedily with a clicking of the tongue. Following this ritual, he slowly put his glass back on the table, joined his hands and cracked his knuckles. Then, he stretched his long legs and, sprawled in his armchair, he announced with a gesture that he was ready for dinner.

– I got it, he said briefly.

– You got it! Carla and Charmé cried out simultaneously, the former with an admiring voice, the latter with a tone full of puzzlement.

– And what did you get? the Police Chief said. He was the fastest to inquire, because he stood on his guard.

– Leadership!

– You're kidding me! Charmé rolled his eyes.

– Is that a question or a statement? Scribble asked.

He looked at his two partners. He felt so satisfied with his quip that he favoured them with a broad smile, before kissing his fingertips in self-praise, and submitting his theory:

– A leader is someone who can drive and channel the energies and the talents of everyone in order to attain his/her objective. The problem...the problem, he repeated like the old crazy scientist in Tintin's adventures, is that the manager's concerns are not the same as the staff's, and that their respective visions of the time dimension cannot be superimposed. So how can you make these two images coincide? Smarto did it! I saw it and everything became clear.

Brunetta and Charmé were staring at Scribble in bewilderment. The speaker did not care and continue his sermon.

– He implemented Investor in People<sup>5</sup>.

5. The reference framework IiP intends to put men and women at the centre of the performance of the firm. It is made of 10 criteria et 39 pieces of evidence classified according to three principles: to establish strategies, to act in view to improving the performance, and evaluate the impact. Its implementation is attested by a certificate issued by a third party.

– He what? Charmé asked, speechless.

Scribble was lost in thought again. He wasn't listening anymore and didn't deign to answer the question.

– The problem, he said once again, is to give something to the employees in exchange for working towards the manager's objectives: each one of us functions as a firm seeking to maximize its profits. And this is the kind of things you do by selling your knowledge, your skills. This is it: the give-and-take rule. The firm, through its manager, is committed to developing the employees' skills, and the employees are involved in the achievement of the firm's objectives through their work and the use of their skills.

The Police Chief was looking at the newly minted professor with amazement.

– He said that he went to investigate on a murder, and guess what, now he is pontificating on the foundations of management!

Carla was increasingly amused by this strange and colourful character, who was turning out to be quite a clever man.

– And it works! Scribble went on. My long and distinguished career as a spook certainly prepared me to delve deep into the shadows, and to check the hidden motives of statements such as these.

The Police Chief nearly choked.

– So you conducted an investigation without a warrant!

– First of all, you Handsome, you must know that a secret agent does not need an authorization. Secondly, my hosts immediately understood that they were dealing with a Messiah of Management and that my mere presence would restore their sight. So I performed an audit, a technical term meaning in the intelligent services' jargon that I grilled...

– What? said the Police Chief, out of breath.

– I am joking. Cool, bello, cool. You flare up too fast. Just have a drink and quietly listen to me. So, Scribble went on while conspicuously turning towards Carla, I had a chat with the staff

to make sure that each employee truly could improve his skills thanks to apprenticeships or training sessions, implement them and have access to more diversified activities. Additionally, employees are encouraged by the management to make progress, they receive help and support. In return, they know the objectives to be reached, the firm's ones and those on which they have a direct impact. Because they can see the link between their work and the results, and because they feel comfortable in doing their job thanks to their skill level, they are satisfied. That's great, isn't it?

– Well done, Brunetta said heartily.

– That's it? Charmé inquired.

– What do you mean, "That's it"? Don't you see that you have got the answer to your question?

– My question related to the accident, not to leadership! the fulminating Police Chief shouted.

– But, bello, what's going on with you? You are running off your trolley! You did get your answer. If I tell to you that it works, and that the people of this firm do their job with much care, competency and dedication, it means that your accident is in fact a murder.

# Who Framed Excellence?

*Foreword by Chris LEBEER, Chief Executive Officer - EFQM*

Could Excellence, too often mistaken for mere performance, kill people? This very topical question will need to be answered by our team of investigators, once again united around the spirited Carla Brunetta and grappling with a new adventure. The discovery of Jean Latour's body in the dawn's early hours is a prelude to a vast investigation all around Europe to understand the meaning of the EFQM acronym and the foundation of the EEA Prize award that is given every year to the best firms.

At the end of this innovative educational thriller, you will know the reasons why this management tool is the key to sustainable Excellence.

**Jacques SÉGOT and Christian MARÉCHAL:** two doctorates (in mathematics and history), 38 years of professional experience promoting quality and, finally, a great thriller mixing unexpected situations, humour and passion to help understanding the approaches to Excellence.

Christian Maréchal is a management consultant and the creator of the ESP assessment method.

Jacques Ségot has been very involved in teaching and coordinating activities for several years to promote quality within the ISO (he is chairing the AFNOR Quality and Management Standards Committee in charge of the advancement of ISO 9000 standards) as well as within La Poste where he initiated the system certification policy, the development of the Professional Equality label, the implementation of the Investor in People reference framework and the Working-to-Excellence approach.



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